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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

(a) REVIEW OF REPORTS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF AFFECTED COUNTRY PARTIES OF REGIONS OTHER THAN AFRICA, INCLUDING ON THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS, AND ON EXPERIENCE GAINED AND RESULTS ACHIEVED IN THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

(b) REVIEW OF THE REPORT ON PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN REGIONS OTHER THAN AFRICA

Addendum

PART ONE: SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS FROM AFFECTED LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN COUNTRY PARTIES

PART TWO: PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Note by the secretariat

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PART ONE: SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS FROM AFFECTED LATIN AMERICAN AND THE CARIBBEAN COUNTRY PARTIES

I. INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with article 26 of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)[2] each Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) country Party is required to communicate through national reports to the UNCCD secretariat, measures undertaken to implement the Convention. These reports will be considered at the fourth session of the Conference of the Parties of UNCCD, to be held from 11 to 22 December 2000.

2. By decision 5/COP.2, the Conference of the Parties requested the secretariat to prepare a synthesis report (decision 11/COP.1, para. 17) based on the information contained in the national reports.

3. The format and content of the national reports are specified in decision 11/COP.1, para. 10. The UNCCD secretariat prepared, in collaboration with several United Nations agencies and African subregional organizations, a Help Guide, which was designed to provide a common format, practical recommendations and support for the preparation of national reports (see ICCD/COP(3)/INF.3).

4. At the Fifth UNCCD Regional Meeting for LAC held at Lima, Peru in August 1999, and at the Grupo Latino-Americano y del Caribe (GRULAC) meeting held at Recife, Brazil, in November 1999, the Parties from the region revised the Help Guide and agreed to follow the resulting version in the preparation of their national reports.

5. In the process of preparing the synthesis report the secretariat developed a comprehensive database. This database is a product of the LAC national reports. Each country has verified the information codified, which will be used in the process for years to come. The main problems, needs and requirements of each country of the region as regards UNCCD implementation can be found in this database.

6. The UNCCD secretariat supported the LAC country Parties in the preparation of their national reports by providing technical and financial assistance when requested. Their assistance and that from other sources is acknowledged in the reports submitted.

II. NATIONAL REPORTS RECEIVED

7. At the Fifth Regional Meeting of the LAC held at Lima, Peru, it was decided that 25 April 2000 would be the deadline for the submission of national reports. By that date, 13 reports, or 43 per cent of the total, had been received; the last submission was made on 19 May (see annex I). Of the reports submitted, 60 per cent were in Spanish, 37 per cent in English and 3 per cent in French. The report is a synthesis based on those national reports. The format and the content of the reports were standardized in accordance with decision 11/COP.1 and the Help Guide.

III. SYNTHESIS OF INFORMATION CONTAINED IN NATIONAL REPORTS

8. Different approaches were used in the preparation of the national reports. While some countries saw this as an opportunity to make a critical analysis and auto-evaluation of the implementation process at the national level, others used it as a platform to launch the preparation process of the National Action

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[2] Decisions 10/COP.1; 11/COP.1; 5/COP.2; 5/COP.3.

Programme (NAP). Irrespective of the approach, the reports present a vivid picture of the UNCCD implementation process in the LAC region. Summaries of the national reports are contained in ICCD/COP(4)/3/Add.2 (A), (B), and (C).

9. One of the conclusions that can be drawn from these reports is that there is a general misconception that the LAC region is only a green region. It is clear from the reports that desertification, as defined in article 1 (a) and (f) of the Convention, is not alien to the region. Land degradation involving, *inter alia*, the processes of soil erosion, salinization and the loss of the productivity of the land is expanding resulting in an increasing number of hectares of impoverished denuded lands, and will finally lead to desert conditions. As the hidden radiography shows, this process has no respect for geographical frontiers. Consequently, a continental vision emerges with the Parties in the region recognizing the Convention as a necessary instrument in the fight against this phenomenon. In this regard the reports show the following:

(a) The majority of the Latin American and the Caribbean country Parties are very much engaged in the process of preparing their NAPs for implementation and are exploring ways of integrating them with other environmental programmes. For some countries of the region, land degradation and desertification processes are not a priority agenda item because there are other more urgent priorities to resolve. But even if there is political willingness to implement the Convention and to create institutions and invest human, technical and financial resources, it is realized that these are insufficient measures as the land degradation situation is grave;

(b) Implementation of the Convention in the LAC region is basically a new process. By 1997, 53 per cent of the countries of the region had ratified or acceded to this international instrument. Prior to this, the figure was only 16 per cent (see annex I). There is however a high level of regional commitment to the process as can be seen from the data in annex I. Their commitment to the national reporting process is further evidence of this (see annex II);

(c) The huge effort made after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED or the Rio Earth Summit), held in Rio de Janeiro on from 3 to 14 June 1992, has helped in the creation of environmental institutions, policies, laws, programmes and projects; it has also helped to give momentum to the institutionalization of the UNCCD process, in the region as well as to the formulation and implementation of the NAPs. Environmental plans have permeated into many sectors including agriculture, water management, energy, science and technology, education and fisheries. It is significant to note however that this new approach is only reflected in the trade relations of a few countries (23 per cent). This fact is indicative of a dilemma in the national development strategies of the LAC countries. Export growth based on agricultural products is considered essential in the economic growth strategies. Even if there is currently an important environmental dimension in the agricultural sector, trade relations demand a certain level of productivity and competitive quality to accomplish the growth goals. Land degradation can result from the repeated intensive cultivation of one crop, which depletes nutrients as well as intensifying the use of the land beyond its productive capacity. The fact that the economic development of several of these countries depends on the production of agricultural products enforces this so-called growth trap, which is exacerbated by the current realities of economic globalization;

(d) The Latin American and the Caribbean country Parties recognize the need for creating synergy between international environmental agreements and programmes or related conventions, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UNCCD, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests or Intergovernmental Forum on Forests (IPF/IFF). Consequently, all these countries are developing national action programmes simultaneously through different projects.

Nevertheless, even where there exists potential for synergy and/or complementary action among these projects, in general, this is still at an exploration phase. Concepts such as the ecosystem approach, equitable benefit-sharing arising from the use of natural resources and traditional knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples that have already been developed in other international environment conventions need to be incorporated into the fight against land degradation.

A. Strategies and priorities within the framework of sustainable development plans or policies

10. Parties were requested through the Help Guide to provide information on national plans and strategies available in other social and economic areas that have relevance to combating land degradation and desertification. National development plans, national environmental strategies in the field of combating land degradation developed prior to the UNCCD, including national and local strategies from Agenda 21, national conservation strategies and plans in other areas were also considered.

11. Before the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the agricultural and forestry sectors were the areas in which the Parties in the region tried to implement policies, plans and strategies concerning land degradation. The policies were usually aimed at soil-and-water conservation and/or rehabilitation. There were however countries that began observing the principles and guidelines of UNCCD in dealing with their arid and semi-arid ecosystems even before becoming a party to the Convention.

12. All reports show that the Parties have formulated and/or adopted environmental policies, laws, plans, strategies and/or action plans addressing, directly or indirectly, land degradation and drought. UNCED provided in large part the impetus for these activities and created the momentum for the treatment of environmental issues by countries.

13. The National Development Plans (NDP) of the Parties include the sustainable development concept as a central element. The new versions of these plans contain in many cases UNCCD principles and guidelines.

14. The concept of sustainable development (economic growth, social equity and environment conservation) through the implementation of conventions related to the ecosystem and Agenda 21 has permeated the national ministries and departments involved directly with the environment and sustainable development planning. However, land degradation considerations in other socio-economic areas are rather low, as is clear from the reports. There is a real need, however, for the integration of these policies in the mining, health, tourism and trade sectors, and to a lesser extent the housing sector. There is also a need to show how sustainable development relates to migration. It must be said that this concept has already been included in the strategies of some countries and in NAPs for several sectors such as mining (23 per cent), trade (20 per cent), tourism (33 per cent), migration (10 per cent) and housing (37 per cent).

15. Thirty per cent of the countries have specific and focused action based on UNCCD principles and guidelines designed to address, through general sectors such as health and education, the problems of arid, semi-arid and sub-humid zones. Others intend to do this through the preparation and development of NAPs.

16. The ecosystem-related conventions and programmes (Climate Change, Bio-diversity and Desertification conventions, and the Intergovernmental Panel/Forum on Forests) are being implemented in all country Parties through different policies, strategies and plans. Synergies among these conventions through policies, mechanisms or financial linkages in specific projects are

still incipient and are not targeted as strategic goals. Some countries are currently developing specific projects in a passive synergetic way as a response to their existing or particular conditions and circumstances.

17. Some countries consider the creation of an international cooperation strategy focused on the UNCCD implementation and the possibility of creating synergies with the other sustainable development conventions as one way of dealing with the current financial difficulties.

B. Institutional measures taken to implement the Convention

18. In accordance with the Help Guide the national reports were expected to provide information on the National Coordinating Body (NCB) of the Parties, covering, *inter alia*, its legal status, its composition, mode of operation and information base.

19. All countries have initiated general environmental policy measures as an expression of their willingness to incorporate the environmental dimension in the development strategy. Ratification of the UNCCD by more than 90 per cent of the countries of the region, as well as the measures taken to create new institutions to deal with environmental problems, is further evidence of this willingness. The lack of capacity to carry out their commitment is however a serious limitation and 53 per cent of the countries have indicated the urgent need for more capacity-building measures to respond to these new requirements.

20. Ninety-three per cent of the Parties have created formal or informal NCBs with the objective of implementing the Convention. In many of them the NCB is under the umbrella of the Ministry of the Environment, generally based at and operating out of their soil, forest, watershed or ecosystems departments or units. The National Focal Point is in most cases the coordinator of this body. In some countries the NCB acts as an advisory body, in others as an executive body.

21. The NCBs of most of the countries (75 per cent) do not have independent legal status, and 92 per cent have no financial autonomy. These are financed out of the budget of the ministry or departments of which they are a part. Due to the lack of resources the officers of the NCBs usually have multiple functions that are often not related to land-degradation activities. Only two countries have allocated financial resources to support the NCB; others have planned to do this in 2001. Twenty-nine per cent of the countries are in the process of defining the legal status of their NCBs.

22. The NCBs are basically bodies comprising representatives of different government ministries, non-governmental organizations, academic institutions and the private sector. The NCBs while being multidisciplinary show a tendency of being government-dominated in terms of representation, and although most of them allow for equal representation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) the same cannot be said for community-based organizations or indigenous peoples. Some countries have developed the idea of open civil society participation (NGOs, local communities, indigenous peoples, church, private sector) by the creation of local branches of the NCBs at the municipal level, as part of their decentralization strategy.

23. Twenty-five per cent of the country Parties have started land-tenure reform measures as a concrete strategy to stimulate the participation of local communities and indigenous peoples in finding solutions to the problems of land degradation. There are a number of factors that hinder the development of appropriate institutional measures; these include the absence of proper land policies as well as current land tenure and use patterns that force local people to exacerbate land-degradation processes. However, decentralization processes are taking place in 37 per cent of the countries. There is also a trend of

giving local populations the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process (33 per cent of the countries).

24. In some countries, apart from the environmental, agricultural and educational sectors, other vital sectors such as finance and economic development are included in the NCBs. Some Parties stressed the need to sensitize the various sectors of government and society in general to the land-degradation problem.

25. A few countries highlighted specific efforts to ensure equal gender representation in the NCBs, while others indicated that the gender perspective would be included in the preparation and implementation of the NAPs.

26. The electronic information systems are at different levels of development. The NCBs in some countries have computers and e-mail capacity (53 per cent), information systems (17 per cent), a database (33 per cent) and Web sites (33 per cent) that directly address land-degradation issues. In other countries the land-degradation information systems are just a part of the general environmental information network.

27. The formulation of the NAP is a process with variable methodological approaches and different timing schedules. Seventeen per cent of the countries have officially adopted their NAPs, 13 per cent are in the process of adopting them and 70 per cent are currently in the preparation stage. In 37 per cent of the countries this formulation process includes analysis of possible synergies between land-degradation processes and other environmental issues.

28. Of those countries that have officially adopted their NAPs, 60 per cent have considered financing them as part of their national development plans and/or their national environmental plans. However even when the NAPs are strategically integrated into the national development plans and/or environmental plans, the necessary allocation of financial resources is not made.

29. The connection of the NAPs with the subregional and regional action programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean has had an unusual development. The fact that the latter two programmes were developed before some countries created their NAPs means that those countries are participating in the programmes and the programmes in turn are influencing the development of their NAPs. This is further proof of a real willingness by some NCBs to implement the Convention even if there is not always a corresponding commitment at the national level in some areas.

30. Although there are political and institutional complexities there is a real need to ensure that policies and institutions have the required effect as regards the implementation of the UNCCD.

C. Participatory processes in support of the preparation and implementation of the national action programmes

31. The UNCCD bottom-up approach is a distinct and crucial principle that should characterize the implementation of the Convention. Most of the countries that are at an advanced stage in the formulation of their NAPs have applied this principle. In the national identification process of establishing priorities for NAPs, these countries have tried to use an all-inclusive approach to allow for the participation of different stakeholders. Several countries have significant experiences in the area of local population participation under the umbrella of general environmental national action plans, which cover the issue of land degradation as well.

32. Private sector participation in the UNCCD NAP formulation process is generally low (23 per cent) in the region.

33. From the reports received it is noticeable that there is a general tendency of greater involvement of women's organizations as well as of students and youths. It can therefore be presumed that while only 16 per cent of the countries reporting mentioned this explicitly, such participation will increase significantly in the near future.

34. It is the view of some countries that stakeholder participation (public, private, national, regional or local) is a crucial point that needs to be resolved in the participation process of UNCCD. Public awareness through communication has a high priority in most of the countries and is used as an instrument to activate different stakeholder participation. Nine countries have developed specific communication strategies. Campaigns, seminars, national workshops, bulletins, videos, triptychs, informative letters etc. are some of the tools used in most of the countries to sensitize the public. Nevertheless, the need for more in-house awareness-raising for different stakeholders was underlined. It is clear however, that the present situation reflects the fact that UNCCD implementation is still in its infancy in the region and there is no doubt that this will improve over time.

35. Direct participation in the process of identification of priorities for the NAPs varied from country to country: while it is up to 2,000 representatives in some cases, it is as low as 60 persons in others.

36. Only a few countries (17 per cent) mentioned the involvement of local actors in the monitoring and evaluation processes.

37. Radio, television and the print media are used by several countries to spread information on land degradation. Some countries have emphasized the need to develop the awareness process at the regional and local level. The multi-ethnic, multilingual and multicultural characteristics of several Parties in the region were identified as additional difficulties in the design of an effective communication strategy that really reaches local populations.

38. Some countries highlighted the need for more information on land degradation for institutions and educational programmes. Most of the local and regional authorities lack information on CCD.

39. Some countries are of the view that Desertification Day (17 June) is a unique opportunity to raise awareness of land degradation among the public. They feel there is a need to further promote this day, and that this could be done by organizing a regionally coordinated campaign project about the day using artistic and media tools.

40. There are NGO networks organizing communication strategies in some countries. Electronic bulletins and Internet web sites dedicated to land degradation are some of the new tools being used in the region.

D. Consultative process in support of the preparation and implementation of the national action programmes and partnership agreements with developed country Parties and other interested entities

41. In some countries 33 per cent of the region where NAPs have been adopted and are now being implemented (NAP-advanced countries), international cooperation has been a key factor in the process of combating desertification. These partners through multilateral and bilateral assistance have participated in the different phases of the formulation of NAPs and have supported very actively technical capacity-building. It is important to note however that the interests and priorities of partners and those of affected countries are not always identical, and do differ significantly at times. There is therefore a need to reconcile these diverse priorities and interests for the further realization of the implementation process.

42. Aside from the NAP-advanced countries, the countries are in general agreement on the lack of participation of international partners as regards capacity-building, transfer of knowledge and expertise. And while some of them have received financial support from some partners it has been basically in the form of small grants. This financial support to NAPs formulation and implementation varies from US$10,000 (low advanced implementation countries) to US$1,000,000 (advanced implementation countries). Other countries have pointed out that even when they have sent their NAPs and/or other proposals and projects related to land degradation to international partners they did not receive a positive response. These facts indicate that the land degradation issue is not a priority in the financial strategies of some developed partners.

43. The international financial institutions, particularly the regional banks, have been active in advanced NAP countries. In other countries regional banks have contributed to some projects that cover issues of land degradation.

44. Those Parties that are at the initial stages of their NAP formulation process have different approaches as regards international cooperation. Some countries have tried to involve the cooperation agencies right at the start of national consultations on the preparation of their NAPs. Others consider it more opportune to formulate a strategy for international cooperation to be executed by their international cooperation office.

45. The ongoing Platform for Cooperation between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean adopted at Recife, Brazil, in October, 1998, is considered by some countries as very important for horizontal interregional cooperation.

46. The subregional horizontal cooperation through projects such as Gran Chaco, Puna Americana, and the Eastern Caribbean Project are considered by the countries concerned as an important part of the implementation process as they allow for the development and implementation of action plans that cut across many borders and frontiers. They also allow for political, social and cultural cooperation in the framework of a comprehensive approach and permit enhanced training, capacity-building and the transfer of knowledge.

47. Several countries have identified the Global Environmental Facility and the Global Mechanism as potential financial partners for the development of activities related to the preparation and implementation of NAPs, as well as regional activities. Some reports indicate that given the diversity of executing agents for international environmental activities, there is a need for effective coordination and monitoring.

E. Measures taken or planned within the framework of the National Action Programme, including measures to improve the economic environment, to conserve natural resources, to improve institutional organizations, to improve knowledge of desertification and to monitor and assess the effects of drought

48. Article 4 of annex III of the UNCCD Convention entitled "Regional Implementation Annex for Latin America and the Caribbean" is the consensual framework on priorities for implementation of action plans and measures. The development of technical programmes and projects under the NAPs varies significantly. Nevertheless, there is a general trend among countries independent of the maturity of the NAPs to concentrate their efforts, or of planning to do so, on three priority areas established by the Regional Implementation Annex. These priorities are improvement of the economic environment in degraded areas; soil conservation and the efficient use of water; and formulation of emergency plans to mitigate the effects of drought.

49. Among some of the NAP-advanced countries a special feature is the remarkable wide multi-stakeholder participation in the NAPs, which has created

an environment that allows the local population and institutions of different regions to formulate several hundred small projects to be executed through bilateral cooperation.

50. Based on the information gathered from the reports there is an urgent need, particularly at the local level, for specific programmes addressing capacity-building and the training of human resources in the area of combating desertification and drought.

51. A persistent idea that emerges from several reports is the necessity to strengthen cooperation between NAPs designed for CBD, UNFCCC and UNCCD implementation. There are no specific or concrete suggestions as to how this may be done.

52. In the LAC region there are clear links between the subregional and the Regional Action Programmes and the countries National Action Programmes. The Gran Chaco and Puna Americana, the Eastern Caribbean Project on Bio-diversity and Land Degradation and the Hispaniola Ecosystem projects are vigorous initiatives that are valued by the countries concerned. The potential of these subregional projects to act as catalysts for the NAPs of the individual countries is an indication of the possibilities for horizontal cooperation within the region.

53. Concerning the region, countries have taken legislative measures aimed at strengthening the relevant institutions, integrating policy to prevent land degradation in agricultural and forestry plans, improving land ecology and economic zoning, and increasing public awareness measures.

54. There is also a trend in the region to try to revive the traditional knowledge and the technologies associated with the management of ecosystems and to improve existing indicators of land degradation.

55. Countries with more advanced NAP processes have developed subprogrammes or strategies for the implementation of measures to improve the socio-economic development. The development of watershed, coastal and soil conservation programmes in arid and semi-arid zones, has been the approach of some countries with regard to socio-economic improvement. Other countries listed specific tasks being developed under this priority issue, but without going into detail. Other countries highlighted, *inter alia*, the different programmes and measures taken under the umbrella of combating poverty to address unemployment, development of the productivity of women and regional funds for rural development, for indigenous peoples and for community development, as the concrete measures being adopted in their NAPs.

56. Multiple projects under the umbrella of different institutions are being developed as part of the NAPs to improve the economic environment, the conservation of natural resources and institutional organization, and to enhance knowledge on desertification and drought in the region. But according to some countries, these projects require integrated approaches as well as medium- and long-term strategies at the local level.

57. Several countries are developing forestry research projects in arid and semi-arid zones linked to forestry productivity with species for multiple uses. Some countries are promoting commercial forest plantations to improve the socio-economic conditions of the rural populations. In this framework a campaign is being developed called "Campaign for the National Ecological Restoration against Land Use Change caused by Forests Fires". Another interesting programme called "Program for the Defence of the Forest Frontier and Soil Conservation" is to establish mechanisms to promote good practices on land use in the agricultural and forestry systems prone to land degradation. These are some of the concrete measures taken by the countries.

58. Research is being carried out on the development of sustainable agriculture and rehabilitation of degraded soils. Production diversification in fragile ecosystems is being explored by some countries with the objective of continuing production while conserving the fauna and flora of these ecosystems.

59. The establishment of national NGO networks to combat land degradation in coordination with the national focal points and NCBs is a trend in the region.

60. The creation of a database and the development of comprehensive Geographical Information System (GIS) for land degradation are priority activities being implemented or planned as a way of strengthening the knowledge base for the development of monitoring systems.

F. Financial allocations from national budgets in support of implementation as well as financial assistance and technical cooperation received and needed, identifying and prioritizing requirements

61. Only 16 per cent of the countries in the region have specific government mechanisms to guarantee the financing of activities to combat land degradation. These allocations vary from country to country.

62. Projects linked to the combat of land degradation are financed from the regular budget allocated for environmental management. However, there are no specific data as to what percentage of national budgets is dedicated for general environment management.

63. Some countries have indicated that given their current economic situation, with little or no economic growth over recent decades, coupled with excessive internal and international debt, money for investment in the environment is scarce. They are hard pressed to find financial resources to be put towards a dedicated fund to deal with issues of land degradation as a top priority. When it is considered that in the year 1999/2000 up to 60 per cent of the annual budget of some countries went to debt servicing, it is easy to understand their sense of priorities. These countries need the assistance of the donor community and the Global Mechanism if they are to develop and implement their National Action Programmes.

64. The channelling of funds to those in need of them and the access of the latter to those funds are issued raised in the reports. The fact remains that local actors have little or no say in these two fundamental issues.

65. Private sector participation in support of community-based projects in affected areas is very low in the region.

66. Fifty per cent of the country Parties have not developed innovative financial schemes for application in land-degradation projects although several countries do have national environmental funds. Some countries have established other specific mechanisms such as a Green Protocol, National Peasant Fund, Land Bank proposal, National Fund for Land Restoration and Conservation, and the creation of an environmental tax for industry. The question is how much of the funds collected from these facilities is actually used for environmental purposes.

67. Some countries pointed out the need to create a financial strategy that would give the necessary impetus to the NAP formulation and implementation processes. The identification of funds calls for collaboration between pertinent institutions to increase the funding capacity. There is also a need to develop strategic partnerships, identify the common objectives of partners, create and implement projects that encourage collaboration between different sectors, create formal instruments of cooperation between agencies and ensure equitable benefits for all concerned.

68. There is a remarkable difference between countries as regards financial assistance and technical cooperation received. International cooperation has been a key aspect in the development of National Action Plans in those countries where such plans are already being implemented; technical and financial support has permitted the development and consolidation of their NAP process. But 77 per cent of the country Parties have affirmed that effective support from international partners for cooperation with UNCCD implementation as regards technical support and capacity-building has been low. Eighty per cent of the country Parties are of the view that support for training and the transfer of knowledge from international partners in terms of UNCCD implementation is very insignificant.

G. Review of the benchmarks and indicators utilized to measure progress, and an assessment thereof

69. In spite of the many existent environmental diagnostics, 33 per cent of the countries in the region have no specific diagnostic on land degradation. If there are such diagnostics they are not systematized but exist in a dispersed way. This situation was highlighted particularly by those countries that are initiating the implementation of their NAPs.

70. Seventy-three per cent of the countries lack information systems on land degradation and this, coupled with the absence of accurate land degradation diagnostic, contributes to the poor monitoring and evaluation of land-degradation processes in the region.

71. The advanced NAP countries have developed specific diagnostics related to land degradation as part of their implementation process and have in general well organized information systems including desertification maps.

72. Several articles of the Convention refer to the need to develop monitoring systems on indicators of land degradation and desertification. In this regard, the UNCCD secretariat provided support for three regional conferences in Latin America and the Caribbean for the development of methodologies on indicators. It has also provided support for an informal consultative meeting at the International Development Research Centre at Ottawa, Canada, in July 1997. One result of this group's work was: "Elements for a method to determine impact indicators" (see ICCD/COP(1)/CST/3/Add.1). As a result of these events, a joint effort undertaken by five countries of the region, aimed at the identification of a unified methodology on indicators, has developed a group of environmental, biophysical and socio-economic indicators. The general idea is that this experience will be spread to the entire region. In this sense, the regional project proposal "Selection of indicators and development of methodologies to evaluate and monitor desertification at the national level" is an initiative that should be developed and implemented. A project being developed between Brazil and Chile called "Indicators: Model for drylands" is also an ongoing initiative in this area.

73. The countries' reports as regards benchmarks and indicators on land degradation can be divided into those that have an active process of developing indicators, those that have not systematized the process and those that have not started the development of indicators. The NAP-advanced countries have developed indicators to measure progress with implementation.

74. Some Parties stressed the importance of considering the need for indicators and monitoring systems during the development of National Action Programmes.

75. The measurement of the conditions and state of health of ecosystems (natural forest cover, water quality, bio-diversity loss and soil degradation) are some of the physical-biological indicators taken into consideration by the region. Although some countries also stress the importance of including socio-

economic indicators, such as health problems, migration rate and land tenure, the pressure put on ecosystems by the demand for goods and services should also be considered in this area. The pressure-state-response approach for the indicator formulation of land degradation processes can be considered as a conceptual framework for the measurement of changes due to NAP implementation.

IV. LESSONS LEARNED

A. Lessons from the NAP formulation process

76. As regards articles 4 and 5 of the Convention, the national reports reveal a region at different levels of NAP formulation and implementation. Most of the NAP-advanced countries have already secured the political and institutional spaces, as well as the confidence and necessary participation of different stakeholders for the implementation process. These countries act as a catalyst for the less advanced in their respective subregions.

77. Land degradation processes are intrinsically linked to the current high deforestation, unsustainable agricultural practices, water scarcity and poor water management in the region. Land degradation occurs in all types of ecosystems and climate. The healthy existence of all ecosystems must be protected simultaneously if the degradation processes are to be effectively dealt with. In this sense the need to widen the framework of application of the Convention to all forms of land degradation is most evident.

78. The loss of tons of soil annually is a common feature in the region. In one country alone there is an annual loss of 59 million tons due to erosion. However, in general, countries of the region do not seem to be aware of the importance of measuring the economic impact of erosion. In fact, only one report indicated the economic losses associated with this form of land degradation (US$300 million per year) and estimated that it will require some US$2 billion over a 20-year period to deal with this problem.

79. The majority of the LAC countries consider poverty as a symptom of, and just one link of the causal chain that leads to land degradation. In this sense, the struggle against land degradation must attack the underlying causes of poverty. The direct and underlying causes of land degradation are however considered in some of the reports, and some of the NAPs include activities to address certain causes. Some countries are working to address current land-tenure patterns through the participation and control of resources by local communities and indigenous peoples, as well as land use, sustainable agricultural policies and coordination of land management institutions.

80. The questions of policy coherence between different sectors regarding land degradation, particularly those linked to the finance, trade and macro-economic policies defined under the umbrella of the national development plan (growth strategies), have not been addressed. This analysis is vital for the region if the underlying causes of land degradation are to be addressed and effective solutions found. The role of these issues in the land degradation causation chain needs to be taken into account during the formulation and implementation of the NAPs.

81. The modern approach of a natural resource management model, which includes an integrated ecosystem approach, the establishment of partnerships and a social mobilization approach, should be developed as part of national environmental policies, strategies and plans.

82. Some countries are developing projects related to the use, management and protection of productive lands. Nevertheless, large scale mono-crop cultivation (food crops, cash crops and tree plantations) and its links to land degradation (soil compaction, erosion, salinization, nutrients depletion etc.) is a subject that has not been adequately treated or analysed by most of the countries. If

unsustainable agricultural practices are promoted as one of the main ways of generating foreign exchange to meet the international financial obligations of the region (external debt, credits, loans etc.) it will be difficult to halt the growing trends of land degradation.

83. Synergy among projects designed under the umbrella of the three sustainable development conventions and the IPF/IFF Programmes is still incipient in the region. There is an urgent need to improve the coordination between these sister conventions and Forest Action Programmes. Such coordination is crucial in order to avoid situations where apparent solutions given by one project in the framework of one convention can be adverse for the accomplishment of the objectives of another convention.

84. The implementation of a national land-use policy that includes control and management of land degradation is an urgent priority for several countries of the region.

85. Even if there is general consideration of the land degradation reality by most of the countries through different mechanisms including environmental strategies, laws and policies, the advance of some countries in the Convention process still leads to the conclusion that there is no explicit preoccupation with land degradation. Consequently, there is no proper institutional approach that results in programmes and projects specifically aimed at combating land degradation, with adequate institutional, human and financial resources and with a corporate institutional project to address the general public or the affected population.

86. It is especially important to ensure that sectors outside natural resources and environment areas are fully aware of the relevance of the issues related to land degradation and desertification. All players involved in the economic planning process should be acquainted with the concepts and definitions pertaining to land degradation. Only in this way will the land degradation dimension be incorporated strategically into the national development plans.

87. In the LAC region, each country has already taken the necessary institutional measures, or is planning to do so very soon, to establish their multidisciplinary national coordinating bodies (NCBs) for the creation of their NAPs for future implementation. The focal points are in general the active agents who organize and coordinate these Committees. In some countries the focal points and the coordinator of NCBs are two different persons or are located in different ministries. In these cases it is not clear who has the maximum authority. In order to prevent possible conflict due to this ambiguity there is a need for the countries concerned to deal with this issue.

88. The authority of the NCBs and that of the focal points as regards other sectors is still weak and ambiguous. In general, the environmental sector in the LAC region needs to be enhanced. Economic decisions and priorities take preference over environmental ones. The NCBs and focal points have to be strengthened.

89. Political instability and discontinuity in some cases in the ministries or departments cause changes in the designated CCD focal points. The NCBs are in a delicate situation as they lack legal status. These institutional uncertainties do have adverse effects on the preparation and implementation of NAPs and on the relationships with the international partners. At the beginning of the NAP implementation process the interest of the international partners could be high. But if there is no continuity of activities/programmes due to internal political changes and instabilities, these partners could lose interest and reduce their participation.

90. In the LAC countries there is a noticeable participation of the academic community in NCBs as well as in the formulation and implementation of NAPs.

This important participation must be enhanced and the involvement of academics should permeate the current and planned, local and municipal NCBs.

91. The countries of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) face substantial environmental challenges with limited managerial and technical resources to resolve them. Limited capacity for implementation because of the lack of human resources is a common feature among these country Parties. Because of this lack and the financial constraints, it is common in the Caribbean countries that the same small group of persons (national focal points) handle at the same time all environmental matters, including the various reporting obligations. Capacity-building measures need to be activated urgently in these countries.

92. The entire region is very conscious of the need to promote the active participation of women in the UNCCD process. Countries are taking steps to introduce it in the formulation and implementation of their NAPs as well as in the formation of their National Coordination Committees. There is however a need for greater efforts to introduce the gender balance in the different phases of the NAPs preparation and implementation; this could make more human resources available to the process.

93. Education is crucial to minimizing and eliminating land degradation. Greater efforts should be made to increase awareness of land degradation and drought in all the countries of the region. The channels of formal and informal education should be used. There is a great need to increase, on a consistent basis, public awareness on general environmental issues, particularly on land degradation which is not given the necessary consideration apart from when it is attached to an externally funded project. New tools such as Internet Web sites and electronic networks dedicated exclusively to land degradation should be promoted in the region.

94. Civil society participation particularly of the affected local populations is a key to the implementation of the Convention, but public awareness of this kind is not very high in the region. Urban populations have not yet been sufficiently sensitized as to the meaning, the causes and the consequences of land degradation processes and their links to food security. In some cases there is a belief that the land degradation processes do affect consumption patterns of urban communities. There is a need for the better use of mass media (radio, television and press) to promote national awareness and greater popular involvement.

95. Local communities and the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples are crucial elements to be incorporated and developed through the NAPs implementation process. This emerging trend should be seen as an opportunity to concretize synergy with the Convention on Biological Diversity, in particular its article 8(j)[3].

96. Indicators of land degradation as well as indicators of progress on implementation of the NAPs are incipient processes in the region. Some countries are trying to develop these through bilateral and/or subregional initiatives. In the development of indicators for the UNCCD process, indicators currently under use in other international environmental agreements should be

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[3] Article 8(j): (j) Subject to its national legislation, respect, preserve and maintain knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and promote their wider application with the approval and involvement of the holders of such knowledge, innovations and practices and encourage the equitable sharing of the benefits arising from the utilization of such knowledge, innovations and practices;

considered. There is an urgent need to develop and implement the regional project on indicators.

97. In many cases the existing environmental legislation is outdated and is hardly enforced in many countries of the region. There is a need to upgrade the legislation and pass new laws to support the fight against land degradation.

98. The formulation and implementation of NAPs by all countries of the region are contingent upon the availability of resources. Horizontal cooperation, such as the ongoing Platform for Cooperation between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, gives hope for the region in terms of resolving the financial and technical problems.

B. Lessons from the national reporting system

99. The Help Guide distributed by the secretariat to the countries of the region provides the terms of reference for the preparation of national reports. This framework, which was observed by all the countries, facilitated the synthesis and allowed the identification of common and emerging trends.

100. Several countries made an extended description of their geographical particularities. This could be resolved by attaching to the national report a country profile duly reflecting its specific features: geographical localization, bio-diversity, forests, climate, rainfall patterns, geology etc.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

101. It is recommended that the Conference of the Parties be invited:

(a) To receive the first national reports submitted by the Latin American and Caribbean region;

(b) To consider the needs, challenges and opportunities both financial and technical, identified by the Latin American and Caribbean Parties, and to take the necessary action to assist in addressing the same.

Annex I

COUNTRY PARTIES THAT SUBMITTED THEIR NATIONAL REPORTS

Country Party	LAC Region Ratification date	Date of submission of National Reports
1. Antigua and Barbuda	June 6, 1997	May 08, 2000
2. Argentina	January 6, 1997	April 25, 2000
3. Barbados	May 14, 1997	May 05, 2000
4. Belize	July 23, 1998	May 11, 2000
5. Bolivia	August 1, 1996	April 25, 2000
6. Brazil	June 25, 1997	April 19, 2000
7. Chile	November 11, 1997	April 26, 2000
8. Colombia	June 8, 1999	April 25, 2000
9. Costa Rica	January 8, 1998	May 11, 2000
10. Cuba	March 13, 1997	April 12, 2000
11. Dominica	December 8, 1997	April 13, 2000
12. Dominican Republic	June 26, 1997	April 18, 2000
13. Ecuador	September 6, 1995	April 25, 2000
14. El Salvador	June 27, 1997	May 2, 2000
15. Grenada	May 28, 1997	April 20, 2000
16. Guatemala	September 10, 1998	April 27, 2000
17. Guyana	June 26, 1997	April 26, 2000
18. Haiti	September 25, 1996	April 25, 2000
19. Honduras	June 25, 1997	May 18, 2000
20. Jamaica	November 12, 1997	April 28, 2000
21. Mexico	April 3, 1995	May 2, 2000
22. Nicaragua	February 17, 1998	April 26, 2000
23. Panama	April 4, 1996	April 19, 2000
24. Paraguay	January 15, 1997	April 19, 2000
25. Peru	November 9, 1995	April 26, 2000
26. St. Kitts and Nevis	June 30, 1997	May 12, 2000
27. Saint Lucia	July 2, 1997	May 2, 2000
28. St. Vincent and the Grenadines	March 16, 1998	April 25, 2000
29. Uruguay	February 17, 1999	May 23, 2000
30. Venezuela	June 29, 1998	May 2, 2000

Annex II

STATUS OF NATIONAL FORUMS/WORKSHOPS

Country	Date of National forums
1. Antigua and Barbuda	April 1998, National awareness Workshop
2. Argentina	During 1996 to 1997 they have organized 40 local workshops with a participation of 2000 representatives.
3. Barbados	May 31 - June 1, 1999, First national workshop
4. Belize	
5. Bolivia	April 2000 National validation workshop of the national report/Several workshops for the NAP formulation have been done between 1994-1997 (example: 25-28/10/94 with 86 participants) (17-20/01/95 with 72 participants)
6. Brazil	
7. Chile	
8. Colombia	February 10-11, 2000 First National consultation workshop
9. Costa Rica	January 1999, Awareness National Workshop
10. Cuba	November 23-24 1995 and March 28-29, 2000 (National Consultation)
11. Dominica	June 1999 (national workshop) and March 2000 (National Consultation)
12. Dominican Republic	March 29, 2000 First National Awareness Consultation
13. Ecuador	February 25-26, 1997 First National workshop/ August 16-17, 1999 Second National workshop
14. El Salvador	February 23-24, 1998 First Awareness Meeting/ October 29-29 1999 Second Awareness Meeting
15. Grenada	March 29, 2000 First meeting of the National Steering Committee (NSC)
16. Guatemala	1997 First National Workshop/April 2000 Validation national report workshop
17. Guyana	Being planned
18. Haiti	June 2000, National Seminary to Combat Desertification
19. Honduras	
20. Jamaica	March 30-31 2000, First Awareness workshop/ April 20th Review Workshop
21. Mexico	1998 National Forum on Desertification and Poverty
22. Nicaragua	May 15, 1998 First National workshop/ May 6, 1998 First National Civil Society meeting about the Convention/April 2000 National Desertification Workshop
23. Panama	October 28, 29 and 30 1997/March 22 and 23, 2000/March 28 and 29, 2000
24. Paraguay	Being planned
25. Peru	Since 1996 several local, national and regional workshops have been organized
26. St. Kitts and Nevis	Being planned
27. Saint Lucia	March 2000, National consultation
28. St. Vincent and the Grenadines	April 12, 2000 First National consultation
29. Uruguay	
30. Venezuela	April 10-11, 2000, National workshop for the National report elaboration

PART TWO: PROGRESS MADE IN THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUBREGIONAL AND REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

I. INTRODUCTION

102. In the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) it is stated, in article 26, that "Each Party shall communicate to the Conference of the Parties for consideration at its ordinary sessions, through the Permanent Secretariat, reports on the measures which it has taken for the implementation of the Convention."

103. According to decision 5/COP.2, the country Parties of the Latin America and the Caribbean region should present their national reports at the fourth session of the COP.

104. According to decision 11/COP.1, information from country Parties may be complemented with the corresponding information on subregional and regional activities. Consequently, the secretariat of UNCCD, with the assistance of its Regional Coordinating Unit for Latin America and the Caribbean, based in Mexico City, has prepared this report on activities in that region.

105. In preparing this report, use was made of documents provided by the secretariat and its Regional Coordinating Unit. Other information was provided by the main entities and individuals involved in all activities as well as some Focal Points in the region. The reports of the five regional meetings for Latin America and the Caribbean, those of the Conference of the Parties and the last three meetings of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean were also consulted. The secretariat OF UNCCD appreciates the financial support provided by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) Regional Office for consultation and for the compilation and systematization of the information.

II. BACKGROUND

106. The region of Latin America and the Caribbean has an area of 20.18 million km^2, with 5.27 million km^2 of this area being dry lands, 70 per cent of which are vulnerable and in an advanced stage of desertification.

107. The general lack of integrated planning in Latin America and the Caribbean in the areas of irrigated agriculture, pastures and forests favours the advance of the physical and biological degradation of ecosystems. The rural population in many countries of the region is more than 60 per cent, which indicates that they depend principally on livestock and forestry activities and, where there is no planning of soil use, there is danger of an increase in desertification.

108. Although the majority of the 33 countries of the region do not have significant areas of dry lands, 6 of them face severe drought problems and have to cope with vast areas of dry lands. Moreover, all the countries face serious land degradation problems affecting the poor, causing extreme poverty and unacceptable marginalization, and annual losses of up to US$2 billion.

109. The land degradation phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean may be characterized in the following way:

- There are 250 million hectares of land affected by desertification in South America;

- There are 63 million hectares affected by desertification in Mesoamerica;

- Soil erosion is the main threat (68 per cent in South America and 88 per cent in Mesoamerica of the total land area affected in each subregion);

- In South America, 100 million hectares of land have been eroded due to deforestation and 70 million by overgrazing;

- In the Caribbean, accelerated and badly planned urbanization has resulted in the loss of agricultural lands and biodiversity, and to the non-protection of watersheds;

- Land degradation has caused migration towards cities in search of new opportunities, which affects the most vulnerable sector of the population, i.e. women and children;

- Drought and desertification have resulted in poverty, disintegration of social structures and economic instability;

- Total losses due to desertification in the region could reach up to US$2 billion per year;

- UNEP figures show there is need for investment of US$13 billion to restore the degraded lands of the region.

110. The country Parties in Latin America and the Caribbean have been developing a series of actions that show their commitment to the implementation of the Convention. This commitment is expressed by the following factors among others:

- The number of ratifications/accessions by countries of the region: 32 countries have already ratified or acceded to the Convention;

- Significant participation in the process of negotiating the text of the Convention, the development and approval of the Regional Implementation Annex and cooperation with other regions in the elaboration of similar instruments;

- Institutional strengthening and the adoption of a regional action programme that identifies the priorities in the fight against desertification, the establishment of a regional coordinating unit and the creation of a regional executive committee that evaluates and follows up activities identified as priorities by country Parties of the region;

- Development of a platform of interregional cooperation between Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean that promotes cooperation, the exchange of information, experiences, and technical and scientific knowledge for the implementation of the Convention in both regions;

- Hosting of regional and subregional meetings with the aim of identifying priorities and strategies, work plans, areas of cooperation and follow-up to the implementation of the Convention in the region;

- Wide participation of non-governmental organizations, and of local and indigenous communities in the implementation of activities within the framework of the Regional Action Programme (RAP);

- The UNEP prize "Saving the Drylands" given in recognition of the work carried out by five countries of the region, for their achievements and successes in the prevention of land degradation and the fight against desertification.

111. All countries of the region have their focal point. In most cases, the preparation of national action programmes has already started even if the degree of integration into national development policies varies between countries.

112. There is a marked increase in the participation of civil organizations, particularly those within the International Network of Non-Governmental Organizations to Combat Desertification (RIOD), in various local initiatives and in the follow-up to Convention activities especially since the Regional Meeting of NGOs held in Ica, Peru, in 1996.

113. The present report discusses in brief the progress made and concludes with proposals for strategies to achieve more efficient implementation of the Convention through the implementation of national and subregional programmes, and the Regional Action Programme.

III. SUMMARY OF REPORTS ON THE PROGRESS OF SUBREGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES AND THE REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMME

The progress of subregional action programmes and the Regional Action Programme

114. The multiple changes in governments had its impact on the formulation and development of subregional action programmes (SRAPs), influencing the continuity of activities and commitments. Nevertheless, the initiatives in all cases continue to be implemented, although not at the desired speed.

115. Worthwhile efforts were made to formulate and implement SRAPs and the Regional Action Programme (RAP) notwithstanding the financial limitations and the institutional capacity deficiencies in various countries of the region.

116. An important limitation in the implementation of the Convention in the region is the limited space for manoeuvring of the majority of the delegations and focal points representing country Parties, as well as the frequent changing of focal points.

117. At the same time, there are favourable conditions for implementation of the Convention, such as the decision adopted by the Ministers of the Environment to pay special attention and support to the problems caused by desertification for the following reasons:

- Its importance to the well-being of the people living in the affected areas;
- The external effects of desertification;
- The linkages between desertification and other issues such as biodiversity, water regimes and climate change;
- The importance of mitigating the effects of droughts and floods caused by meteorological phenomena, such as global warming, the effects of which are augmented by the poor conditions of watersheds and improper land management.

Subregional action programmes

118. The Third Regional Meeting (Cuba, July 1997) decided to establish the following subregions: South America with 6 country Parties, (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Guyana, Paraguay, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay); the Andean subregion, with 5 country Parties (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela); the Caribbean, with 11 country Parties (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines) and Mesomerica, with

8 country Parties (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Panama).

119. The countries concerned have identified nine SRAPs and/or subregional projects establishing priorities and covering transboundary implementation.

120. The execution of the SRAPs is incipient, with the exception of the Gran Chaco Americano Project. That project has completed an important process of consultation, proposal elaboration and institutional arrangements that is of great significance for the region.

Regional action programmes

121. The RAP was conceived and formulated at the different regional meetings held during the meetings of the International Negotiating Committee for the Convention prior to COP 1, as well as at the three sessions of the COP. The RAP was approved by decision 1 of the Third Regional Meeting, and it includes nine regional projects. The specific project profiles and initiatives considered important by the country Parties were subsequently determined and added.

122. The RAP is, in a strict sense, based on partnership in accordance with the principles of the Convention. It is comprised mainly of projects aimed at providing the region with instruments for the coordination and improvement of national capacities for the implementation of the Convention, through the formulation and application of NAPs.

123. The majority of the projects of the RAP lack financial support. However, some of them have started to show signs of dynamism.

IV. PROGRESS OF SUBREGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMMES

Gran Chaco Americano Project and mechanisms of institutional cooperation between member countries

124. The Gran Chaco Americano Project covers a vast region extending over areas of Argentina, Bolivia and Paraguay, with natural resources characterized by their fragility, and a relatively scarce, poor and marginalized population. Given the multiplicity of transnational relations existing in the region, the Governments of the three country Parties decided to embark within the framework of the Convention to Combat Desertification, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Framework Convention on Climate Change coordinated in a SRAP, on action to improve the living conditions of the population and to protect the natural resources and biodiversity present.

Areas of cooperation covered by the programme and measures adopted or planned

125. The consultations undertaken resulted in a work plan covering different themes, subjects and activities as follows:

- Collecting, characterizing and systematizing information;
- Planning actions to mitigate and reverse the processes of degradation;
- Reversing migration, marginalization and poverty;
- Promoting the use of appropriate technology for sustainable development;
- Developing common strategies that facilitate the sustainable use of shared natural resources;
- Strengthening technical and scientific cooperation, and creating information networks;

- Measuring local capacities;

- Encouraging the harmonization of relevant public policies.

126. Up to May 2000, a number of activities were held, directed at the following:

- The creation of a provisional executive committee to coordinate action and link the countries participating in the SRAP;

- The establishment of norms and working procedures and the nomination of responsible officials in each country;

- The preparation of an agenda for the SRAP;

- The establishment of procedures for characterizing, formulating and managing corresponding projects;

- The creation of a facilitation fund.

Consultations for the preparation and implementation of the SRAP and partnership agreements concluded with developed countries and other interested parties

127. The proposal and formulation of the Gran Chaco Americano SRAP benefited from a rich consultation process. Among the most relevant activities were:

- The initiatives of direct action by non-governmental organizations and local officials;

- The Tenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean (Argentina, November 1996) at which the SRAP was approved;

- The agreement of the three country Parties to implement the project, taken during the Second Regional Meeting of the Convention to Combat Desertification (Mexico, June 1996);

- The refining and concretization of the SRAP, which was later proposed for adoption by the government representatives of the country Parties represented at the regional meetings, held in Asuncion, Paraguay, March 1997, and Resistance, Argentina, May 1997. National, departmental and state governments, the private sector, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations participated in the meetings;

- The hosting of the First Subregional Forum for the launching of the Gran Chaco SRAP (Argentina, May 2000).

Financial resources granted to the affected countries for the implementation of SRAP and technical assistance received or needed

128. This project received a contribution of US$60,000 made by the Spanish Government, through the UNCCD secretariat, to cover travel expenses and logistics for hosting awareness and coordination meetings.

129. The United Nations Development Programme Office to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNDP-UNSO) supported the formulation of the initiative, methodology, consultation process and creation of a work programme for the SRAP. Special mention should be made of its role as adviser in the establishment of the Facilitation Fund, which is currently being negotiated.

130. The Gran Chaco SRAP is very complex, due to its holistic approach to the regional sustainable development. This is the reason why, once the SRAP and its

components have been formulated, it is necessary that the governments of the country Parties, in the first place, and international cooperation support the initiative.

Subregional Action Programme for Sustainable Development of Puna Americana

131. The Puna is a geographical region characterized by conditions of aridity, risk of land degradation, low productivity and the poor quality of life of its inhabitants. It is common to extensive areas of the high mountain ranges of the Andes, in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru. The affected countries in the area started activities for the implementation of a subregional programme within a conceptualized regional framework for sustainable development.

132. One of the conditions which give the regions their homogeneity regardless of national frontiers is the whole set of peculiarities which exist in the Puna American, where natural resources are limited and have caused poverty, migration and marginalization. This is the reason why the countries sharing these characteristics agreed to the implementation of joint action through a subregional action programme.

Areas of cooperation within the programme and measures adopted and planned

133. As a result of previous consultations, the delegates of the five country Parties with sponsorship from UNDP-UNSO agreed during the Third Regional Meeting, (Cuba, March 1997), to start a subregional process for the formulation and implementation of the SRAP and to proceed by:

- Establishing a sustainable development programme to complement the implementation of the National Action Programme of each country and to contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of the local population;

- Designing the SRAP with a definite framework and through the following activities: exchange of information, promotion of the participation of community youths, indigenous people and women, application of adequate technologies for the specific conditions of the region and its population, and the promotion of traditional knowledge, practices and techniques;

- Formulating for each country specific actions in the general framework adopted;

- Exchanging initial proposals prepared for review during the second subregional meeting;

- Presenting the programme during the second Conference of the Parties of the Convention (Dakar, November 1998) to obtain financial and technical support;

- Establishing an executive secretariat for coordinating the first phase of the programme. The National Forestry Corporation of Chile will carry out this function.

The process of consultations in the preparation of the Subregional Action Programme and partnership agreements between developed country Parties and other interested parties

134. During the negotiation meetings prior to COP 1, the country representatives, together with UNDP-UNSO, with the aim of obtaining ideas on the feasibility and content of a SRAP for the Puna Americana, carried out a process of consensus building at different levels (governmental, non-governmental and academic).

135. In June 1998, the representatives of the country Parties involved, the secretariat of the UNCCD, UNDP-UNSO and RIOD met in Santiago de Chile and adopted the necessary decisions to speed up the formulation process and the ultimate implementation of the SRAP.

136. A process of consultation is presently being carried out to establish the terms of reference of the project and those for the participation of country Parties and agencies of cooperation.

SRAP in Mesoamerica

137. Due to the severe and recurring disasters in the isthmus of Central America, COP 2 manifested its support to the countries affected by these phenomena and requested the agencies and the developed country Parties to prepare a specific action plan to prevent and mitigate the negative effects of these natural phenomena in this region.

138. UNEP gave technical assistance for the formulation of a project on the sustainable management of watersheds in Central America. The project will run for three years and foresees the preparation of a map of vulnerability as well as planning, training, educational and field activities. This project requires the financial assistance of US$11 million for its realization.

139. The Interagency Technical Committee of the Forum of the Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, comprising representatives from UNEP, UNDP, Inter-American Developing Bank (IDB), the World Bank and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), decided to give technical and financial support for the establishment of a regional environmental unit based in the offices of the System of Integration for Central America in El Salvador. Its task is to coordinate the implementation of environmental initiatives in the region.

SRAP for the small island States of the Caribbean

140. The Caribbean in general and the small insular States of the region in particular frequently suffer the effects of land degradation. Their insular condition and dimension make this a significant risk. At the Fourth Regional Meeting (Antigua and Barbuda, April 1998) the country Parties requested the preparation of a specific programme for this subregion.

Areas of cooperation covered by the programme and measures adopted or planned

141. The programme emphasizes the following priorities: training; public awareness; a general subregional course on desertification; and an analysis of the desertification process in the islands of the Eastern Caribbean.

Consultations for the preparation and implementation of the SRAP and partnership agreements with developed country Parties and other interested parties

142. The secretariat, with the support of the Focal Points and experts, prepared the project: "Protection of Biodiversity and Prevention of Land Degradation in the Small Insular States of the Caribbean". This project has been submitted to the Global Environment Facility for funding. At the same time negotiations are ongoing with the European Union for the formulation and implementation of a specific project on land degradation in the eastern Caribbean.

143. Moreover, the UNCCD secretariat, with the support of the IDB, commissioned a study on "The Impact of Land Degradation on Fragile Ecosystems of the Insular States of Latin America and the Caribbean and Measures for their protection",

which was presented and discussed at the Fifth Regional Meeting (Peru, August 1999).

Cooperation with Haiti and the Hispaniola SRAP

144. At the Caribbean Subregional Meeting held in 1996, the Caribbean country Parties agreed to consider Haiti as a country deserving priority attention. In annex I adopted during the Second Regional Meeting, it was decided to send an urgent mission of technical assistance to Haiti with the aim of helping to start the preparation and execution of its National Action Programme. Later at the Third Regional Meeting, it was decided that Haiti should be given priority in the fight against desertification. This position was confirmed with the adoption of decision 9 at the Fourth Regional Meeting.

145. The UNCCD secretariat assisted Haiti in the preparation of a project concerning the fight against land degradation and the protection of biodiversity, which was presented to the GEF by the Government. It is also in contact with the Global Mechanism and CARICOM to promote concrete action and technical assistance for the country.

146. Due to the difficulties faced by the Haitian representatives in gathering national information and establishing a coordination body, the UNCCD secretariat, based on a decision of the country Parties, organized a mission to that country. Representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Cuba and Mexico as well as from the secretariat and RIOD participated in the mission.

147. At the request of the Government of Haiti, the secretariat provided a financial contribution for the establishment of a small coordination unit within the Ministry of Environment in Haiti, to help with the preparation of the National Action Programme and the development of specific projects. The secretariat is currently helping in the preparation of a comprehensive plan of assistance and support for Haiti to combat desertification. This plan includes the search for financial and technical resources from agencies and donor country Parties. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) sent an exploratory mission, following which the Haitian authorities prepared a national profile on desertification, which is the basis for the National Action Programme.

148. The exploratory mission to the island of Hispaniola (September 1997) showed among other things the need to have an integral approach to the island due to the close relations at all levels, especially concerning migration between the countries that share it, namely Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The main existing concern is that the land degradation process in Haiti is advancing and it tends to merge with that in the Dominican Republic.

V. THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REGIONAL ACTION PROGRAMME

149. Decision number 1 of the Third Regional Meeting, which was later concretized at the Fourth Regional Meeting, formally approves the Regional Action Programme to Combat Desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean. This programme is the result of many consultations and discussions carried out by the country Parties during the first three regional meetings and the sessions of the Negotiating Committee prior to COP 1.

Areas of cooperation covered by the programme and activities realized or planned

150. In accordance with the principle of partnership as promoted by the Convention, the RAP facilitates coordination, the joint search for opportunities for technical and financial cooperation, mutual horizontal support and exchange of information. Apart from this, the following priority activities have been defined:

- Project on indicators and benchmarks for monitoring desertification;

- Creation of an information network (DESLAC);

- Project for the explicit introduction of a gender perspective in the implementation of programmes to combat desertification;

- Project for the harmonization of public policies;

- Project for the recovery and promotion of traditional knowledge and technology in Latin America and the Caribbean;

- Project for local, national and regional actions in education to combat desertification;

- Project on training to combat desertification;

- Establishment of a regional system for investment management to combat desertification;

- Horizontal cooperation to combat desertification.

Consultative process to support the preparation and implementation of the programme and partnership agreements

151. The hosting of the regional meetings facilitated an intense exchange of ideas, which was conducive to the precise identification of priority projects to advance the Convention. Apart from the approval of RAP as the framework plan, each project has its own dynamics. The secretariat and the chairpersons of the executive committees have been working so that agencies, foundations, private enterprises and donor country Parties will support these projects, but there has been little result thus far. The development of the projects of the RAP is summarized below:

Project on benchmarks and indicators for monitoring desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean

152. The project to create a unified system of indicators became part of the Regional Action Programme after the Third Regional Meeting at which it was approved. A work plan was presented by some country Parties to the IV Regional Meeting and it was decided to continue the work according to that plan.

153. The Governments of Brazil, Chile and Mexico, with support from UNEP and the Natural Heritage Institute, prepared a project proposal to serve as the basis for the measurement of desertification, taking into consideration causes, current state and consequences. The project is based on the pressure-state-response approach containing benchmarks for planning the fight against desertification and allows for transparency of action. These benchmarks can be used at various levels with possibilities for comparison and follow-up of measures taken against global or continental desertification, as well as of smaller geographical areas: national, state or departmental, municipal and community.

154. Once the Regional Meeting had approved the project, a first version of the methodology was prepared and reviewed during the Workshop on Methodology (Mexico, February 1999), held with financial support of GEF. The basic agreements to set up local pilot projects in these three country Parties were reached at this meeting.

155. The planned measures are aimed at obtaining useful field experiences in different conditions and country Parties for selecting benchmarks, indexes, indicators and to design a unified system of indicators that can be applied in

country Parties with greater capacity as well as in those suffering greater technical and institutional deficiencies.

156. The further development of the database is planned in collaboration with the GTZ-ECLAT. This will allow the recovery of information in an aggregated or specific way, which can be consulted and administered through the regional system of information. The development of national systems of consultation is also planned.

Information Network to Combat Desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean

157. At the Workshop of the Network of Arid Zones sponsored by the FAO (Patagonia, November 1995), the need to have an expeditious means of communication between participants of this Network was highlighted and it was agreed to examine ways of organizing a mechanism of this kind. Some months later, during the First Regional Meeting of the Convention, this agreement became part of a draft for an action programme for the region, since various participants in the Information Network to Combat Desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean (DESELAC) acted as focal points for the Convention.

158. At the Second Regional Meeting proposals were made to set up an information and communication system. The Meeting requested the continuation of work on the definition of a project profile, taking into account a format for autonomous national de elopment with networks for sharing information as well as some basic agreements to make the information systematized by each country compatible.

159. The Regional Action Programme adopted at the Third Regional Meeting included the above-mentioned Information Network. At the same time, the secretariat was requested to formulate a project to be presented to potential donors. This project was approved at the Fourth Regional Meeting.

160. DESELAC was conceived as a system of information, coordination and communication for actors and observers in the fight against desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean. It comprises the following:

(a) Databases on human, physical, institutional, technical and financial resources;

(b) General information and basic official documents for dissemination and information to help in decision-making;

(c) Infrastructure to carry out coordination activities and distance conferencing, mainly through a mailing list, electronic forums for consultation, and moderated and non-moderated electronic conferences.

161. DESELAC is a dynamic and decentralized action programme, which needs minimum infrastructure and central staffing. Moreover, DESELAC promotes the creation of national networks, their use and management, and the creation of national capacities for the establishment of active nodules in the country Parties and for their connection to the project.

162. DESELAC has received the financial and logistical support of the secretariat of the Convention, UNEP and the German Government, and has received a contribution from the Government of Argentina. A number of activities have been undertaken:

(a) Consultations to obtain the financial support for the regular and full operation of the project;

(b) Development of a Web page installed on the server of the Regional Office of UNEP in Mexico City;

(c) Regular publication of the electronic bulletin "Newswire";

(d) Organization and hosting of online conferences;

(e) Realization of a moderated electronic conference on desertification and the fight against poverty in coordination with Fidamérica and the Global Mechanism;

(f) A study on national capacities for the establishment of national networks carried out by the secretariat with assistance from the Regional Coordinating Unit;

(g) The Development under the guidance of Riod-Mexico of a photographic archive, financed by UNEP and the Ford Foundation;

(h) The Creation in collaboration with FAO, the University of Arizona and a consortium of institutions of a global database on institutions and organizations involved in the implementation of the Convention;

(i) Establishment through e-mail of an information exchange system.

163. It is hoped that 11 national nodules of DESELAC will be created in the coming months. This will allow for a greater exchange of information, the development of national networks with local nodules and the development of new national networks through mechanisms of horizontal cooperation.

164. Ninety per cent of the countries of the region and more than 200 experts, focal points and other actors working to combat land degradation are involved in the programme.

Explicit Incorporation of a Gender perspective in the fight against desertification

165. As with other environmental concerns, steps will be taken to consider, in the context of the Convention, the need to introduce a gender perspective that permeates the activities and the perception of the problems of desertification and its solutions. This subject was discussed, among others, at the First Latin American Assembly for Rural Women (Brazil, November 1997).

166. At the Third Regional Meeting, an NGO representative pointed out the lack of an explicit incorporation of a gender perspective and that it was not included in the Regional Action Programme. At the Fourth Regional Meeting, it was proposed that a project related to this subject should be included in the Programme. This was approved at the Fifth Regional Meeting.

167. This project tries to convert into concrete action and commitments the reiterated favourable declarations on the adoption of a gender perspective as regards efforts for development, the fight against poverty, the general conservation of natural resources and the regional projects and in particular National Action Programmes to combat desertification.

168. The project is in a pilot phase with four participating country Parties. Its components are: conceptual development; analysis and identification of investment initiatives; election of participating country Parties, with preference to those who have already initiated action in this field; definition of the responsibilities of national institutions; and reformulation of programmes and projects for the inclusion of a gender perspective.

169. The planned activities are as follows: awareness raising; preparation of capacity-building materials and their distribution; identification and enabling of national capacities for the promotion of the gender focus; seminars; and training promoters.

170. There are different ongoing activities in the region, such as the bilateral Argentina-Chile project in the Atacama-La Rioja-Catamarca micro-region. Similarly, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in collaboration with non-governmental organizations is supporting an initiative for the establishment of promotional units in environmental bodies, governmental and non-governmental.

Harmonization of public policies and desertification in Latin America and the Caribbean

171. The country Parties of the region have discussed the issue of adequate policies at every regional meeting. At the Third and the Fourth regional meetings, the country Parties requested the support of the UNCCD secretariat in preparing a project aimed at establishing a regional framework for the revision of policies and relevant instruments, and in carrying out this exercise in a coordinated manner. This project was presented, discussed and approved as a priority at the Fifth Regional Meeting. At COP 2, the Global Mechanism, the UNCCD secretariat, UNEP, UNDP, FAO, IDB and IFAD committed themselves to supporting the project and suggested the guidelines. The Regional Coordinating Unit prepared a new version of the project with the same goals as those of the version approved at the Regional Meeting in Lima, and with a proposal from the list of participating country Parties to the supporting bodies, which is presently being considered.

172. With a pilot project centred on six country Parties, the Project on Harmonization of Public Policy (PHPP) uses the experience of a preliminary evaluation done in Mexico in 1998 and joins, through regional workshops and DESELAC, six autonomous exercises in each participating country. In the first year, the country Parties will carry out evaluation exercise mostly with decision makers, as well as national and international studies. The linking of the project with developing agencies creates favourable conditions for the immediate application of the results of the exercise. PHPP intends to mobilize existing and complementary resources through reorientation and cost-effective measures with minimum financial investment.

Project to enhance and promote traditional knowledge and technology in Latin America and the Caribbean

173. The regional meetings have discussed and adopted declarations and decisions with the aim of advancing the creation of an effective programme on traditional knowledge and technology. By decision 12 adopted at the Fourth Regional Meeting, the countries concerned requested the secretariat to formulate a pertinent project, which was adopted by the Fifth Regional Meeting. Argentina and Cuba presented a regional report on this subject, which was prepared with information received from the countries concerned, to the ad hoc Panel held at Materra, Italy, in July 1999. The conclusions were presented at the third session of the Committee on Science and Technology during COP 3.

174. The project to enhance and promote traditional knowledge and technology deals primarily with activities in various countries and is a long-term proposal collecting reiterated ideas of recognition of the value of traditional culture of the population in the affected areas as well as the dynamic processes of the synchronized adaptation of technology developed in research centres. The recognition and use of the popular culture in the creation of technological solutions, of mechanisms for the transmission of knowledge or for the development and strengthening of community institutions for regulating the access and use of resources is consistent with the spirit of partnership contained in the Convention. Activities aimed at strengthening knowledge of, and the distribution and application of those assets existing in the countries of the region are important. This approach underlines the importance of community participation as well as the training and institutional strengthening

to achieve results that are sustainable over the long-term including intra-community, municipal, regional, governmental or non-governmental sectors.

175. The project has the following components:

(a) Research activities, innovation and application, inventories, selection, tests and monitoring;

(b) Concepts and materials relating to traditional knowledge and technology included in the plans, programmes and materials of the educational system at different levels; production of informational material, diffusion through the mass media, training, review of educational plans and programmes;

(c) Creation and strengthening of institutions;

(d) Evaluation and reform of public policies in a legal-normative framework;

(e) Development and strengthening of cooperation and exchange mechanisms; incorporating the theme in the NAP and in development programmes.

Local, national and regional action to combat desertification through education

176. The countries of the region have identified a deficiency in public information as regards matters related to desertification. That is why the educational issue represents one of the most urgent tasks in the implementation of the Convention. Consequently, it has been included as a priority in the RAP and the Fourth Regional Meeting approved (decision 13) a proposal of activities on this issue.

177. The project seeks to address the marginal and elementary state of knowledge and awareness of the processes that lead to desertification. The main strategy is to increase the number of monitors or trained agents able to prepare groups of people who have knowledge of the concepts, methods and activities of the UNCCD. It is a progressive plan that has three levels of complexity: elementary, intermediate and advanced according to the degree of preparation of the trainee. The project proposes training for trainers and the production of adequate educational material with a basic common regional content and with specific aspects for each country.

Training

178. The region has accumulated vast experience in the management of natural resources and other subjects of interest in the fight against desertification, although through non-coordinated initiatives. One of the main activities that has been successfully realized is a series of six courses on desertification, organized under the auspices of UNEP and subsequently in conjunction with FAO and other national and international bodies. The participants gave different appraisals as to the effectiveness of training activities and agreed to design a new scheme that will include the work already undertaken. For this reason a meeting was held on the topics and characteristics that could be included in a training programme.

179. This project, which is complementary to the project on education, is aimed mainly at providing conceptual and instrumental tools to experts who are working directly in the fight against desertification. Its organization will be carried out through a programme with 31 training themes in four areas: production systems; natural resources management; management of plans, programmes, projects and policies; and various topics (development of social capital, the fight against poverty, a gender perspective). Four courses of three or four weeks duration and based on the above-mentioned topics will be held over a two-year

period. These will include seminars, workshops, training courses and other planned activities.

Establishment of a regional system for investment management to combat desertification

180. The First, Second and Third Regional Meetings developed a scheme for the mobilization of economic resources for the implementation of the Convention at the regional, subregional and national levels through the improvement and systematisation of proposals, an increase of flow of information and follow-up activities. At the Fourth Regional Meeting the country Parties approved the project planned by the secretariat at their request.

181. The project has the following aims: establishment of a bank of projects; realization of a preliminary feasibility study and integration of a portfolio of ideas and investment profiles; organization of training courses, instalment of hardware equipment and development of an information system that could be installed within the DESELAC; organization of a workshop with cooperating agencies to review the portfolio and adapt proposals to the mandate and legal framework of each agency; and organization of negotiation missions by the Regional Coordinating Unit to promote financing of the projects.

182. For the mobilization of funds, the project also has the following aims: analysis and survey of funds that can be used for the RAP and NAPs, and characterization of each source of funding; consultations with the country Parties and financial sources in order to concretize the proposals; promotion of regional, subregional and national funds; and organization of a workshop to finalize the proposal.

Fundamentals for a permanent programme of horizontal cooperation to combat desertification and drought

183. Articles 16 and 18 of the Convention and article 5 of its Regional Implementation Annex for Latin America and the Caribbean establish a form of cooperation which includes the exchange of information and knowledge, as well as direct technical, scientific and financial assistance. Article 7 of the Annex specifically mentions the exchange of information and experience between country Parties. It is on this basis that country Parties requested, during the Third Regional Meeting, the secretariat to prepare a project aimed at promoting and facilitating different activities for cooperation between the country Parties of the region. This project was approved at the Fourth Regional Meeting.

184. This project is not merely a joint programme of activities, it is an agreement between the country Parties and agencies supporting the implementation of the Convention in the region. The proposed scheme foresees meeting certain costs (for example meetings of the Regional Executive Committee, coordination and systematization of activities relating to the RAP projects, and bilateral and multilateral exchanges) as regards the coordination of activities for the implementation of the Convention.

185. The programme will be implemented through an agreement between the country Parties which decide to share the costs. The travel costs as well as those for necessary equipment will be covered by the cooperation agency based on an agreement. The preparation of the budget will be done by the agencies, and the formulation of an anticipated programme will be carried out by the Executive Committee or the competent regional meetings.

186. In the preparation of this programme, previous experiences in this area may be taken into account: the exchange of information between the country Parties in the development of the Gran Chaco project or the missions of

consultants to specific countries to assist them in the preparation of national reports.

Regional Coordinating Unit

187. At the Second Regional Meeting it was decided to accept the offer of Mexico to assist in the establishment of a body to promote the implementation of the Convention in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the offer of UNEP to host it at its Regional Office. The decision to create the Regional Coordinating Unit was taken at the Third Regional Meeting which requested the secretariat to prepare a proposal and work plan, which were approved at the Fifth Regional Meeting. The country Parties of the region presented the RAP and the programme concerning the Unit to COP 1, which welcomed the initiative.

188. The Regional Coordinating Unit is an instrument of the UNCCD secretariat at the regional level and its task is assisting in the implementation of the Convention specifically at the regional, subregional and national levels. The Unit works closely and on a day-to-day basis with national focal points and the representatives of NGOs and community based organizations.

189. The Regional Unit, under the direction of the UNCCD secretariat, is currently undertaking the following tasks:

- Support in the preparation of national reports for the Convention and other official documents;

- Preparation of regional and subregional reports on the implementation of the Convention in Latin America and the Caribbean;

- Technical assistance to country Parties of the region in the development, evaluation and follow up of programmes and/or projects of the Regional Action Programme and subregional activities;

- Development of a photographic database;

- Technical and logistic support for the organization of regional and international meetings;

- Facilitation of exchange of information, and appropriate techniques, technical know-how and relevant experiences at regional level;

- Assistance to focal points in the promotion of capacity-building for implementing activities in the region;

- Follow-up decisions adopted at the UNCCD regional meetings;

- Facilitation of consultative processes for promoting technical cooperation between the focal points of the region;

- Support for the creation of new mechanisms at the national, subregional and regional levels, including desertification funds, to mobilize domestic financial resources for the implementation of the Convention;

- Assistance in the coordination of Networks on thematic programmes and future implementation of the activities recommended by countries of the region.

190. This Unit officially started its activities on 3 August 1999, when the respective agreements of collaboration between the Government of Mexico, UNEP and the secretariat of the Convention were signed. The establishment and functioning of the Unit has been possible thanks to the technical and financial

support of the Governments of Argentina, Chile and Mexico, UNDP/UNSO, UNEP and the secretariat of the Convention.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIC LINES

191. Based on the information contained in the national reports prepared by country Parties of the region, as well as the information resulting from the preparation of the subregional and regional reports on the implementation of the Convention in Latin America and the Caribbean, the strategic lines of action given below are recommended as they will enable more effective and coherent implementation of the objectives of the Convention.

Regional Action Programme

192. There have been no significant results at regional level to date due to the fact that many projects could not be implemented because of the lack of resources. The secretariat, the country Parties and the agencies involved should combine efforts and work hard to mobilize the necessary funds which will help the materialization of the projects listed in the present report.

Concrete activities

193. In order to develop the DESELAC programme, it would be necessary to enlarge the network to include secondary and tertiary institutions and other relevant partners. Also, the complete establishment of DESELAC at the headquarters of the Regional Coordinating Unit should be ensured, making sure that it is fully interactive and connected to other networks to increase its informative capacity.

194. The adoption of a unified method for the formulation of benchmarks and indicators for the evaluation of land degradation will allow training and the sharing of experts to promote the production of information, mainly in less developed countries and always on the basis of horizontal cooperation.

195. The use of traditional knowledge, technologies and practices in the region should be increased, taking into account the experiences that have resulted from the work by the experts of the region.

196. The fight against desertification is through awareness and education of all sectors of society in the countries of the region. There is need for this subject to be included on the school curricula with the aim of creating a new relationship between human beings and their environment.

197. The strengthening of cooperation between countries of the region should be realized through bilateral, subregional and regional relationships in which the UNCCD secretariat will have an important coordinating role to play. NGOs and the community-based organizations should also be involved.

198. Women play a fundamental role in the region, which is not sufficiently recognized at the institutional, economic, social, technical and scientific levels. For this reason, following the general trend of including gender perspective in each and all projects to combat desertification in the region is indispensable for the achievement of the objectives of sustainable development.

199. The project on the harmonization of public policies is considered of singular importance for the countries of the region. Although it already has the support of various international agencies it is necessary to continue supporting it as this will provide all countries with know-how regarding vital tools to create the appropriate institutional framework to combat desertification.

200. The Regional Coordinating Unit has a supporting role in complementing the functions of the secretariat at the regional and subregional levels. The RCU will support the efforts of the countries of the region, with the aim of cooperating in meeting the needs of the different national actors and of coordinating the implementation of the RAP on a daily basis. It is therefore necessary that this instrument be strengthened and that the needed resources are available to carry out its work.

Subregional programmes

201. The country Parties involved in the Gran Chaco Americano project have shown a very serious commitment to its implementation. At the same time, the UNCCD secretariat is engaged in mobilizing the resources necessary for the success of the project, but it is vital that all the agencies reinforce their support for the project.

202. The Puna Americana and Mesoamerica subregional projects need major promotion so that the donor country Parties and the agencies will support the efforts for their preparation and move to the execution stage. Due to the fact that both subregions are seriously affected by land degradation there is a need to act as quickly as possible.

203. Notwithstanding the efforts to carry out case studies and the preparation of reports on the impact of land degradation on fragile ecosystems, the Caribbean SRAP needs financial resources and technical support as explicitly indicated at the Fifth Regional Meeting.

204. The particular political conditions which existed in Haiti in the recent past did not allow for progress with the plans of assistance. The hope is that the situation will change so that joint action can proceed in the fight against land degradation.

Focal points

205. Increasing the decision-making capacity of environmental institutions at national as well as international levels in the different forums of the Convention is of crucial importance. This will serve to enhance capacity when implementing activities, managing projects and obtaining technical and financial support. As a consequence of this, the country Parties should:

- Designate focal points with operative capacity and access to the highest levels of decision-making;

- Allow continuity of national representatives to the Conference of the Parties and the regional meetings;

- Encourage the elaboration of studies and the dissemination of official documents produced during the various meetings held in the framework of the Convention;

- Strengthen the coordination between different institutions related to the Convention, and between those and the international actors.

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